

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 6983, the "Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008." I would first like to commend Representative *Patrick Kennedy* and Representative *Jim Ramstad* on their outstanding efforts and tireless work on this important issue.

For far too long too many individuals and families have struggled with mental health illness and substance abuse disorders and yet have faced a health care system that provided them with unequal access to care. This bill is a step in the right direction for our country as it provides another degree of fairness for our citizens.

In short, it ensures that group health plans can no longer charge people more for seeking treatment for mental health or substance abuse problems. It also provides that out of pocket and visit limits may be no different for mental health and substance abuse care than for other medical care.

According to a report by the Lieutenant Governor's Mental Health Cabinet in Connecticut, of the nearly 600,000 of our state residents who experience symptoms of mental illness, 135,000 suffer from a serious condition and 66,000 suffer from a severe condition. Countless others suffer from debilitating substance abuse disorders. These problems are every bit as serious as other medical conditions and must be treated by our health care system as such.

Again, I want to commend my colleagues who worked so hard on this issue to reach a bipartisan compromise and reiterate my strong support for this legislation.